



**Testimony of Emilie Montgomery  
Executive Director of Early Care and Education, Community Renewal Team  
Elementary and Secondary Education Public Budget Hearing  
February 21, 2017**

**Restore Funding for Care4Kids**

To Senator Slossberg, Senator Rosario, Representative Somers and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Emilie Montgomery, and I am the Executive Director of Early Care and Education at the Community Renewal Team. I am here today to offer testimony opposing further cuts to the Care4Kids Program. I also respectfully request that the leaders and members of the Appropriations Committee work to approve the \$155 million in funding this fiscal year so that the program can aid families at the same level as in early 2016.

Let me give you a little background: Because of new regulations imposed with no increase in funding, Connecticut's Care4Kids program ran into a deficit. The state's response was to close the program to most new applicants as of August 1, 2016. Throughout the Fall, families who came up for redetermination were told they were ineligible, because their income was too high or they did not meet other conditions. This impacts thousands of parents attempting to enter or remain in the workforce. Without subsidies, these parents must either find cheaper, unregulated, and often poor-quality child care or quit their jobs to care for young children. As of this week, 10 families have withdrawn children from CRT classrooms due to inability to pay for care without the subsidies.

For CRT, as with other early childhood programs throughout the state, the cuts to Care4Kids are already having a serious negative impact. The long-term consequences of a continued funding gap will be devastating to Connecticut's child care centers.

Of CRT families currently enrolled in or waitlisted for the Care4Kids program, 93% are single-parent households. Without access to affordable childcare, many may be forced to reduce their work hours or leave jobs entirely to stay home and care for children. These are parents working toward a better life, paying a portion of their salaries in parent fees for preschool, and counting on quality programs to keep their children safe.

In 2016, four Connecticut children died while left in unregulated – and sometimes illegal – child care. Assistant Child Advocate Faith Vos Winkel was quoted in July as saying, "Families need to have access to high-quality, safe child care. We don't want them ever leaving their children with unlicensed providers." But as assistance for quality programs disappears, more families will be



forced to choose between putting food on the table or providing a safe and nurturing environment for their children to learn and progress.

Complicating matters is the fact that 35 CRT classrooms affected by the C4K cuts are located in three sites that were renovated with CHEFA funding – funding that requires the maintenance of 90% of the enrollment at the time the CHEFA loan was issued. At these sites alone, there are 176 children who have either been denied C4K subsidies or placed on the program's wait list. That is half of the previously-eligible enrollment at those sites.

As parents pull their children from the classroom due to inability to pay, CRT is left with under-enrolled programs, potentially forcing classroom consolidation and staff layoffs, and leaving the agency at risk of defaulting on the covenants of CHEFA funding. The domino effect of these closures will affect families outside C4K in several ways: First, fixed costs would have to be absorbed by other programs, which could cause increased parent fees. Second, if classrooms – or entire buildings – are closed due to under-enrollment, non-C4K families will lose access to quality educational experiences as classroom slots are reduced.

CRT's service area covers 40 Connecticut towns, stretching from the Massachusetts border to the Long Island sound. The agency operates 74 classrooms, and more than half – 46 rooms – include families currently utilizing Care4Kids subsidies to obtain quality early childhood care for their children. Of those classrooms, 11 serve infants and toddlers, for whom safe, affordable care is at a premium.

There is no stereotypical picture of the impoverished, and over the last few years we have experienced many more working families reaching out for help. Across Connecticut, more than 2,000 of these families are currently in limbo on the C4K waiting list as the state deliberates how to proceed. Continued chipping away at C4K leads to a drastic reduction in quality early childhood services and could send many families backsliding into severe poverty. For CRT alone, this means:

- Potentially eliminating more than 47 staff positions,
- Closing multiple classrooms,
- Letting the significant education gap between at-risk and privileged communities grow even wider,
- Witnessing potential lost wages in the community of \$1.2 million as parents are forced to reduce hours to care for children, and
- Telling more than 375 children that they can no longer come to school to learn, socialize with their teachers, and develop bonds with their friends.

Losing the Care4Kids Program means more than balancing a budget. Every dollar taken from this program is a dollar taken from a child and from a family actively working to improve its future.



For them, Care4Kids funding must be restored. The ripple effect of these cuts will devastate thousands of Connecticut families. Please contact me if you have any additional questions, or if the CRT staff can be of assistance. Thank you.

**Community Renewal Team, Inc.**

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